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DEPARTMENT FOR NSC, EAP, EAP/K
FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR THE PRESIDENT

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO KOREA,
NOVEMBER 18-19

Classified By: AMBASSADOR KATHLEEN STEPHENS. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Welcome to Korea

¶1. (SBU) Mr. President, all of us at Embassy Seoul warmly welcome your first official visit to Korea. The U.S.-ROK alliance is in arguably its best shape ever, and it is growing in scope. We have a historic opportunity to expand cooperation with an ally that sees its national interests as coinciding with our own, and with increasing political will and capacity to play a larger role in the region and the world. President Lee Myung-bak has renewed Seoul's commitment to close coordination with Washington, including in dealing with North Korea. Lee's desire to build a "Global Korea" offers opportunities to expand our strategic cooperation beyond the Korean Peninsula, in areas such as combating climate change, reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, and assistance to the developing world.

Unparalleled Success Story

¶2. (SBU) The U.S.-ROK partnership and Korea's development since the Korean War stand as enormous achievements for both our countries. Long hailed for its economic success, in recent years Korea's thriving democratic institutions and vibrant civil society have been among the great success stories of the 20th century. As one of Asia's premier democracies, the Republic of Korea is an anchor for freedom and rule of law in a region still shadowed by authoritarianism and remnants of the Cold War.

Supporting Korea's Leadership

¶3. (C) Supporting Korea's emergence as a global player is in our interest. Publicly recognizing Seoul's leadership on global issues will pay dividends. By buttressing Lee's improving standing with the ROK public, your visit will provide him with political capital to support us on difficult issues such as Afghanistan. Lee gets credit for Korea's rapid and skillful response to the global economic crisis, and his forays into regional and global diplomacy (hosting an ASEAN leaders summit in Korea earlier this year, winning the hosting rights of the G-20 summit in 2010, and reinvigorating ROK-Japan high-level meetings), have all contributed to restoring his stature at home following the political basting he took in 2008 for allegedly "caving" to U.S. pressure to re-open domestic markets to our beef imports. The immediate public backlash to that decision, shamelessly stoked by

disgruntled opposition groups still stinging from their defeat in the presidential and national assembly elections, got Lee's presidency off to a rough start from which he has only recently recovered. (Most recent polls put his approval rating at above 40 percent, a dramatic recovery from the single digit numbers he was registering a year ago).

14. (C) In spite of the price he paid for the beef issue, Lee has remained committed to a strong bilateral partnership. At the same time, his push to host the G-20 summit next year and his "Grand Bargain" overture to Pyongyang are prime examples of his desire to demonstrate to the Korean public his own brand of leadership. While his instinct is to support us on virtually any issue that matters to us, at the same time President Lee is careful to make clear that he is not simply doing Washington's bidding, particularly on always-sensitive inter-Korean issues.

Leading on North Korea

15. (C) The challenges presented by North Korea) its nuclear program, the ever-present possibility of DPRK instability or provocation, and the ongoing tragedy of the division of the Korean nation) constitute the ROK's defining strategic problem, and President Lee is resolved to work as a full partner with the United States in addressing Pyongyang on these issues. He has jettisoned his predecessor's policy of separating the nuclear issue from inter-Korean reconciliation, telling the North that denuclearization is a precondition for ROK assistance and cooperation; this change has facilitated our ability to coordinate with Seoul our approach to the DPRK. At every level, ROK foreign policy is

currently dominated by experienced America hands who believe deeply that Seoul must stay in step with us. Lee will seek to confirm with you that his "Grand Bargain" (in Korean, the phrase is closer to "comprehensive deal") proposal is consistent with our approach. He will be interested in your impressions from your talks with Chinese leaders about North Korea, and will likely affirm to you that he is hanging tough on withholding food aid and other assistance to the North, despite increasing pressure from the opposition party and some segments of South Korean society.

FTA Creates Foothold in Asia

16. (SBU) The Korea-U.S. (KORUS) Free Trade Agreement is a critical element of our effort to anchor Korea to the United States for the next generation, and likewise anchor the United States in Northeast Asia. In addition to the substantial mutual trade benefits, the symbolic effects of the KORUS FTA would be profound, both in terms of our commitment to Northeast Asia and in further tying Korea to the United States during a time of rising Chinese influence. President Lee has faced criticism for his inability to generate momentum for FTA passage in Washington. The ROK sees the potential window for U.S. ratification of the agreement as short, from February to May of 2010 because of mid-term Congressional elections in the U.S., and Lee is eager to get as definitive a commitment as he can from you on the timing of the way forward on the FTA. He may suggest tying passage of the FTA in 2010 to commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the start of the Korean War. In any event, the ROKG recognizes that it will be asked by the USG to do more, particularly with respect to autos, to make the FTA ripe for Congressional consideration.

17. (SBU) The KORUS FTA is Seoul's highest trade priority, but the ROK is not waiting on us, and during the hiatus on KORUS has concluded free trade agreements with the European Union and India and is negotiating agreements with Australia, New Zealand, Peru, and Canada. During the October 10 summit with his Japanese and Chinese counterparts, President Lee even committed his government to a joint study of options for a China-Korea-Japan FTA.

Like-Minded on Climate Change

¶18. (SBU) Climate change and clean energy are high priorities for President Lee, who believes that investing in clean energy technologies leads directly to job creation, greater energy security, and long-term economic growth. His draft legislation on "low carbon and green growth" would reduce Korea's greenhouse gas emissions primarily through deployment of clean technologies, particularly nuclear power. In cooperation with Italy, Korea is developing a technology action plan on Smart Grids under the Major Economies Forum. The ROK supports the U.S. position in international negotiations that China and other major emerging economies must take meaningful steps to reduce emissions. In August, Korea was the first "developing" country under Kyoto to set out options for its own domestically-binding mid-term emission reduction targets. Your meeting with President Lee takes place as we reach the final phase of preparations for the UNFCCC Copenhagen meeting and affords the opportunity to add momentum to our efforts on climate change.

Hosting November 2010 G-20 Summit

¶19. (SBU) The ROK takes enormous pride in having been selected to host the November 2010 G-20 Summit. As a country that only recently graduated from the ranks of the developing world, the ROK believes it is well-positioned as the 2010 Chair of the G-20 to bridge the interests of advanced and developing countries. President Lee is aware that the ROK owes its seat at the table to USG support and has shown a strong willingness to work closely with the United States within the G-20. Seoul hopes that by the November 2010 summit the focus can shift to post-crisis global economic growth strategy. We support the ROK's emergence as a leader in the global economic community and can look forward to close bilateral cooperation as we work toward next year's meeting.

Korea's Own Peace Corps

¶10. (SBU) The Republic of Korea has in a single generation transformed itself from an aid recipient country to a donor nation. President Lee has stressed that Korea is in a unique position to use its experience to help developing countries lift themselves out of poverty. To this end, Seoul has committed to tripling its development assistance budget to .25 percent of gross national income, applied for membership in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, and will host the 2011 Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

¶11. (SBU) President Lee has also heightened the profile of Korea's overseas volunteer program by establishing "World Friends Korea," which has already placed almost 4,000 volunteers abroad and will soon reach 6,000. We are exploring, in cooperation with USAID, a cooperative framework in which both countries work together to address rural development, world hunger, and other global challenges to add a new and positive dimension to the U.S.-ROK alliance. Such cooperation would enable us to collaborate in seeking program synergies and increasing the effectiveness of both our efforts.

Convention on International Child Abduction

¶12. (C) The burgeoning people-to-people ties between our two countries make it important that Korea join the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, the legal mechanism for the return of (or access to) a child illegally taken from one country to another. The Convention is critical to USG efforts to resolve international cases of child abduction. We have worked this issue hard with the Koreans, both in Seoul and Washington, but there is disagreement among Lee's ministers. A word from you to President Lee about the importance you attach to Korea's

accession could break through the bureaucratic resistance and
secure ROK accession.
STEPHENS